Q)Elucidate the nature of political obligations in the Shantiparva.

or

Explain the idea of ‘Rajadharma’ as mentioned in Shantiparva of the Mahabharata.

Ans: The Mahābhārata, the greatest epic of India contains eighteen parvans or the books. Among these eighteen parvans Śāntiparvan is the largest one.The **Shanti Parva** ( *Santi parva*; "Book of Peace") is the twelfth of eighteen books of the Indian Epic [Mahabharata](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mahabharata). The book is set after the war is over- the two sides have accepted peace and [Yudhishthira](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yudhishthira) starts his rule of the [Pandava](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pandava" \o "Pandava) kingdom. The Shanti parva recites the duties of the ruler, [*dharma*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dharma) and good governance, as counseled by the dying [Bhishma](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bhishma" \o "Bhishma) and various [*Rishis*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rishi).  It is consisted of 365 chapters,13,716 number of verses and is divided into three sub-sections, namely, Rājadharmānuśāsana, Āpaddharma and Moksadharma Parva. From the greatness and vastness, this parvan is held to be very important than other parvans.

The Santiparva acquires a higher position because, this parva describes all religious systems along with caste system (four castes: Brāhmana, Ksatriya,Vaiśya and Śūdra), four Purusārthas ( dharma, artha, kāma and moksa ) , four āśramas (grhastha, varnāśrama, vānaprastha and sanyāsa), various legends , ākhyānas and upākhyānas, social economic and political system, and lastly the way of salvation.

***Kingship-the Rajdharma:***

The genesis of the word ‘Raja’ relates with the origin of ‘Rajya’. To start with, Bhishma based the king’s authority in the first chapter of Shantiparva upon unbending interpretations of the

King’s origin. In the second verse of chapter 67 Bhishma says that “the coronation of a King is the first duty of a kingdom.’’

In this context deliberation on Rājadharma by Bhīsma to Yudhisthira may be taken as one of the important aspect. In the Rājadharmānuśāsana section of this Parvan, Yudhisthira along with his brothers and other remaining members of the Kuru family performed the śrāddha ceremony of the warriors of the great war. It depicts the decision of Yudhisthira to go to the forest and live the Bānaprastha life. At this Juncture all his brothers and Draupadī adviced him to change his decision and at the end at the request of Vyāsa and Śrī Krishna , Yudhisthira agreed to rule the kingdom. Yudhisthira was installed as the king of the Hastināpura and he decided to remain as the subordinate to Dhritarāstra.

After installation , Yudhisthira and Dhritarāsta performed the śrāddha-ceremony of the dead warriors of the great war. Yudhisthira praises Śrī Krishna and Śrī Krishna advised Yudhisthira to go to Bhīsma and get knowledge on Rājadharma from him. And for this purpose Krishna conferred His grace on Bhīsma. And by the Lord’s grace Bhīsma regained his memory fully, and forgot all pains from the arrow. So, Bhīsma answered each and every questions asked by Yudhisthira regarding all kinds of Dharma particularly on Rājadharma.

**Duties of the king**

According to Bhisma, the prime duty of the king is to protect the people and work for their well-being. The Santi Parva presents a monarchical model of state and kingship. But it puts dharma and people at the centre,not the king or the state. It clearly states: ***rajyam sarvamisam nityamarjaveneha dharyate,***which means state is a common property and it is for all and kings must keep it with purity and simplicity.

The 59th verse of chapter 68 states that “The king is the heart of the people; he is their great refuge; he is their glory; and he is their greatest happiness.” In Shantiparva, while discussing the significance of king’s authority, Bhishma tells that the king must give up his likes and dislikes. The king should act fearlessly and perform acts based on dharma and should always behave in an impartial manner. The king should have good command over dandniti and he should give utmost importance to dandniti. It is only through dand that the king can manage the affairs of the state in very smooth manner and can guide everyone to be on the path of dharma.

A king is known by his excellence in the knowledge of and conduct according to the dharma. The goodness of king lies in spreading of goodness in his dominion too. The Santi Parva says that when a huge tree grows,it becomes shelter for a variety of birds and creatures. Similarly,a good king becomes shelter for a variety of skilled people.He protects good people,scholars and punishes criminals. To establish law and order, he should distribute departments among able ministers as per their merit. A king is compared with 1,000 -eyed Indra-***saharaksa-***a symbolic of having knowledge of everything that happens in his territory.

There is superiority of Rajadharma over varnadharma, as varnadharma can be observed only when a king observe rajadharma properly. Rajadharma is superior to all other dharmas. Great emphasis is given to the purity of mind while performing the rajadharma and dispensing justice.

***King – the indispensable***

The importance of a king for the state is emphasized time and again. Where there is no king there is no dharma ,where there is no dharma there is no social order. Without a king there prevails anarchy. It is the duty of a state to install a king for the protection of dharma and social order. The kingship is glorified as embodiment of people. Kings are prescribed to rule the subject with utmost control over senses,and with truth and harmony.

A wise king should try his best to avoid war,for peaceful co-existence and for the welfare of the people. He should dispense justice without any bias. His duties includes just taxation, fortification and deployment of soldiers, facilating agriculture ,husbandry etc.

***Two powers of the king-nigraha and anugraha***

The two basic powers or strengths of a good king were nigraha-the power to command and control, and anugraha-the power of compassion. Through nigraha, he punishes the criminals,traitors, miscreants and unscrupulous servants and officials. Through anugraha,he wins the trust of his people,ministers,scholars and teachers. Nigraha is called a special strength only when the right to use danda is exercised judiciously.

***Apaddharma of a king***

Appaddharma(apat+dharma) is a term used for what is dutiful in a situation of crisis and described in the Santi Parva in many ways. Apat or apatti of a king or kingdom is when it is encircled by enemies . This happens when king’s own people start betraying him, military and wealth are destroyed, when ministers show lack of moral standards; then the apaddharma of a king is to use his wisdom in the best way.

Thus the rajadharma always acts as the guiding principle of the king. Although kingship is inevitable ,it is always controlled by the rajadharma.

**Government**

In Shantiparva, Rajdharma is a compendious term to comprehend the duties and obligations relevant to political and administrative affairs. Through government peace, law and order can be maintained in the state. The main work of government is the happiness of the people, to provide justice is the another aim of the government. In the state the King is the head of the government. In good governments administration people sleep carefully, fearlessly. Executive was made of the combination of King, ministers and other

officials. Besides executive, legislature and judiciary were two other organs of government. But importance was given to executive mainly. In Shantiparva, there was a great emphasis on the above ministers. In the absence of the dutiful and able ministers, King cannot run government properly. In Shantiparva King was advised to keep the intelligent and dutiful ministers.

Thus in the Shantiparva, rajadharma constituted mainly the duties of the king towards his subjects and his administrative activities. The details of rajadharma make it clear that the basic spirit behind rajadharma was to ensure peace and prosperity of the people and in doing so the state was also expected to maintain impartiality. The whole section of the Santiparva, dealing with the rules, relating specifically to the art of government, is known as the Rajdharmanushasana Parva.